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ABSTRACT

This review of research and other literature on educational vouchers provides an overview and history of the voucher concept and voucher programs. The author first looks at several existing versions of the voucher idea, such as the G.I. Bill and Denmark's free schools. California's Alum Rock voucher experiment is evaluated, with suggestions about the obstacles preventing the program from becoming a real voucher system. Comments from an interview with voucher expert Christopher Jencks elucidate the report. Emphasizing that voucher models differ in more ways than they agree, the author explains and compares six proposed voucher program models. Particular attention is given to the "Family Choice" model that proponents hope to see on the June 1980 California Ballot. Included are quotes from a telephone interview from John Coons, father of the model. Issues discussed include the question of whether a voucher system would violate the separation of church and state, promote segregation, raise the cost of education, or encourage unethical speculators to open schools. The author concludes that the voucher concept is still vigorous and has not yet had a fair trial. (Author/JM)

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EDUCATIONAL VOUCHERS

John Lindelow

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FOREWORD

Both the Association of California School Administrators and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management are pleased to cooperate in producing the *School Management Digest*, a series of reports designed to offer educational leaders essential information on a wide range of critical concerns in education.

At a time when decisions in education must be made on the basis of increasingly complex information, the *Digest* provides school administrators with concise, readable analyses of the most important trends in schools today, as well as points up the practical implications of major research findings.

By special cooperative arrangement, the series draws on the extensive research facilities and expertise of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. The titles in the series were planned and developed cooperatively by both organizations. Utilizing the resources of the ERIC network, the Clearinghouse is responsible for researching the topics and preparing the copy for publication by ACSA.

The author of this report, John Lindelow, was commissioned by the Clearinghouse as a research analyst and writer.

S. Lee Hawkins
President
ACSA

Philip K. Piele
Director
ERIC/CEM

INTRODUCTION

Most simply, education vouchers are certificates that the government would issue to parents, parents would give to the school of their choice, and the school would return to the government for cash. The results of the institution of a voucher system, so the theory goes, would be the end of the stagnant monopoly of public education and the creation of a competitive and creative free-market system for the delivery of education. Competition among schools for students would improve the overall quality of education, and families would have a range of schools to choose from.

This is the gist of the classicial voucher theory that has been propounded since the eighteenth century by a variety of capitalist philosophers, most recently by Milton Friedman. For the past fifteen to twenty years, however, liberal social reformers have been promoting voucher systems as a means of equalizing educational opportunity, reforming school finance, facilitating desegregation, and improving education for low-income and minority children.

To achieve these ends, the reformers have revised or "regulated" pure voucher concept or simply added provisions, such as the abolishment of property taxes for education. In short, most of the recent voucher proposals are highly modified versions of the capitalists' original "unregulated" voucher idea.

From the time liberals first started promoting the voucher concept in the late sixties, the idea has retained the questionable title of "panacea." It is easy to see why this characterization developed. Capitalists, in the first place, believed that the simple mechanisms of free-market enterprise could do much to improve education by breaking the public monopoly that was, as they

saw it, the root of the evil. Liberals took the original voucher idea, hung their favorite social reforms on it, and began proclaiming it as a cure-all.

Even today, when someone speaks of a voucher system, it is difficult to tell what, entirely, is being talked about. The theories and plans are most often so unspecific that almost anyone can support or attack the voucher idea, depending on how one envisions the plan finally being implemented. As an article entitled "Vouchers: Expensive Journey Up a Cul-de-Sac" put it:

> Vouchers lend themselves to this kind of free interpretation. They can be developed along many different lines to express many different social, economic or political aims. It is not possible to be pro- or anti-voucher in principle because vouchers can be adapted to serve many different principles.

Power to the Consumer

Undoubtedly the greatest impetus for voucher proposals comes from the central theme of the original voucher theory—consumer sovereignty. A new consumerism is now arising in the nation, demanding choice, quality, accountability, and consumer information from education. According to Clinchy and Cody,

> Having performed the miracle of mass education, we are now confronted with the results of our labors: an adult population of parents who are knowledgeable, questioning, and restive. . . . Increasingly, they reject the autocratic operations of the system as being impossibly rigid, thoroughly undemocratic, and quite unable to respond to the diverse but legitimate demands that parents are making on behalf of themselves and their children.

Clinchy and Cody point out that the school system necessarily became standardized and based on mass production, beginning around 1850, in order to accomplish "the most massive formal schooling effort in the history of humankind." Finding themselves in a system that gives little diversity or choice, parents are now clamoring for a change. The more standardized and uniform the school system becomes, and the less choice

and diversity it offers, the more parents will support such radical reform ideas as vouchers and tuition tax credits.

Others see support for voucher proposals stemming largely from the self-development movement, wherein the individual is given maximum choice, even to the detriment of the common good. The movement is seen by some as selfish and antisocial, working against the ideal of social cohesion. Given this movement and the recent revival of interest in cultural and ethnic roots, it is clear that a reconceptualization of the balance between unity and diversity in American life is taking place. Right now, the pendulum is swinging toward increased diversity and choice, which is where it's been heading since the 1940s, when nationalism and social unity were at their height.

Consumerism, then, is at the heart of voucher proposals, both the traditional capitalist and the recent liberal versions. All the significantly developed liberal versions, however, have included additional regulations designed to enhance equality, reform school finance, or do both.

Financial Equalization

Perhaps the most common voucher appendages deal with equalization, whether it be of opportunity, taxation, or school spending. For example, most plans give a voucher of greater value to disadvantaged children. The disadvantaged are more difficult to educate and thus are less attractive to schools; a larger voucher compensates the school for the difficulty of educating the disadvantaged child. Some plans also attempt to equalize the tax burden by charging parents for vouchers on a sliding scale according to income.

Undoubtedly the largest inequities recent voucher plans propose to redress are those brought on by widely varying property taxes. In fact, if present systems of taxation for education were more equitable, voucher

proposals might now have much less punch. As it stands, however, the nation is in the midst of not only school finance reform, but a general reconceptualization of property taxes as well. Thus, some voucher proponents have simply tacked on tax reforms of various sorts to their total voucher package, though tax reform is *not* an essential feature of the voucher concept. Vouchers could be paid for with property taxes, if desired, just as they were at Alum Rock.

Variation in the amount of resources spent per pupil among districts is what the Supreme Court of California decided was unconstitutional in the *Serrano* case of 1971. Since then, several other states have ruled their property-tax-based systems of school finance unconstitutional. The impetus for school finance reform has been building steadily, particularly since 1976, and it may soon reach a climax. California legislators, for example, are under pressure to come up with a school finance system that will meet the requirements of the state's equal protection provisions.

Aid to Parochial Schools

The movement for public financing of private (largely parochial) education is also finding its expression in voucher proposals. The recently (November 1978) defeated Michigan proposition to install a statewide voucher system and abolish the property tax was advanced by a sole group (Citizens for More Sensible Financing of Education), which was backed by Catholic and Protestant school associations. Obviously, the parochial schools are looking, as they have since the early 1800s, for ways to fund their schools with public monies.

From a legal viewpoint, they do have some reason to be optimistic. The United States Supreme Court in recent years has accepted several new forms of public aid to parochial schools. Advocates of voucher plans point out that voucher money would be going directly to

parents and only indirectly to religious organizations, thus averting church-state conflict. But only an actual case testing a specific voucher plan will illuminate the Court's stance on this form of parochiaid. Consequently, some voucher plans do not allow participation of parochial schools, while others retain parochial school participation as an optional element.

Current voucher proposals are thus very mixed bags. Two voucher proposals may share a name and a few common elements, but beyond that they may be worlds apart. It is important, then, to examine carefully each individual proposal to determine what issues it addresses.

The final impact of a given voucher plan on education is very difficult to judge, because so many of the details have to be worked out after the basic philosophical shift is made. Predicting the effects of a voucher plan's implementation is at least as difficult as predicting the outcome of a tax limitation measure. Probably the impact of a given plan will be neither as negative nor as positive as its critics and advocates predict.

Finally, there is the possibility that voucher proposals will never be instituted on a large scale, and that their main impact will be as a stimulus for much-needed change. Currently, the two major forces that are making voucher proposals popular are growing dissatisfaction with the public school system and widespread dissatisfaction with the way that system is funded. Undoubtedly, improvement in these areas can be attained without resorting to such a radical solution as vouchers. But if no action is taken, or the action is too slow, vouchers do stand a fighting chance.

HISTORY OF THE VOUCHER CONCEPT

For nearly two hundred years, the voucher idea slept quietly in the back pages of capitalist philosophy, awoken only a few times by the pens of theoretical economists. Then, starting in the 1950s, the idea began to be seen as a means to other than capitalistic ends—ends such as maintaining segregation, providing public aid for private education, reforming school finance, and equalizing opportunities. The idea's recent development has been closely intertwined with these other issues, particularly church-state conflict and school finance reform. This chapter will explore the voucher idea's relationships to these two issues and describe both the early and recent development of the concept.

Early Development

The idea that parents should be allowed to choose their children's education in a competitive free-market system is at least as old as Adam Smith. In *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith proposed that government give money directly to parents for the purchase of educational services in order to inject some creativity and competition into the stagnant educational monopoly of his day. Basically, his idea was that of "consumer sovereignty": parents, the "consumers" of education, should have ultimate authority over the kind of education their children receive. Given alternatives and the power to choose among them, parents would be at least as wise as government officials in choosing the best education for their children.

Thomas Paine brought Smith's ideas to America in the late eighteenth century, but added that the poor should be given special aid and that parents should be

required to purchase education for their children.

In 1859, John Stuart Mill picked up the banner again in his essay *On Liberty*. Mill, attempting to reconcile his idea that education should be a societal responsibility with his libertarian philosophy, proposed that the government should require a minimum education for every child, but that parents should be free to obtain the education where and how they pleased. Mill warned against the dangers of compulsory, state-controlled education, stating that a government education should exist only "as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus." Mill also supported the notion of government subsidies for the education of the poor.

Thus the outlines of voucher theory were sketched by Smith, Paine, Mill, and others over a century ago, yet only in the last two decades or so has the idea been further developed. This eighty-year hiatus was caused, in large part, by the increasing popularity of compulsory public education in the late 1800s. The growing influx of immigrants, coupled with a strong American nativism, made the public schools essential to the goal of creating a unified American culture. For better or worse, the public schools taught a common, largely Protestant set of values to the diverse ethnic and racial segments of the American population.

This swing toward compulsory public education became so strong that in the early 1920s several states sought to require *all* children to attend public school, even the children of the rich who could afford private education. But the United States Supreme Court in a 1925 decision *(Pierce v. Society of Sisters)* held that the Fourteenth Amendment protected the right of a family to choose a private education. Although the Court supported free choice in principle, freedom to choose was in reality available only to the rich and those who considered private education an acceptable alternative to the public system.

The "Americanization" campaign continued through the twenties, ebbed slightly in the thirties, and picked up steam again in the nationalistic forties, when school standardization probably reached its height. Finally, during the late fifties and early sixties, the melting-pot image of America itself began to melt. Radical critics in the sixties began attacking the public school system as being unresponsive to minorities and the urban poor, and stultifying to human development in general. At the same time, conservative economists, and Milton Friedman in particular, began criticizing the public school system as the perfect example of a stagnant monopoly.

History of the Church-State Wall

Other reasons for the recent rise of the voucher idea can be perceived by examining the history of religious education in the United States. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, schools were denominational in character, and public support of religious education was common. Schooling of almost any type was welcome. But as education became more available, infighting developed among sects, and particularly between Protestants and Catholics. According to Smith and Bryson:

> Concern over the religious complexion of schools mounted in direct proportion to the arrival of large numbers of Irish and German Catholics. Indeed, many feared the possibility of a papist alliance with European Catholic monarchies to conquer the country and subject it to ecclesiastic rule.

The answer for the Protestant educational leaders of the day was to advocate making public education nonsectarian and to support that premise with a particular interpretation of the First Amendment that implies government shall not financially aid religious education.

The early public schools, though, were far from nonreligious—Protestant hymns were sung and the

King James version of the Bible was used. In reality, a compromised Protestant ethic—designed to do "violence to no one's conscience"—was taught. However, the public schools did offend Catholic educators, who believed strongly that a Catholic religious atmosphere should permeate the entire educational experience.

The Catholics attempted again and again to obtain public funding, but the Protestant-dominated establishment fell back on their claim that schooling be nonsectarian. Over the years, public education was made more and more secular in response to claims by Catholics and others that the public schools were continuing to teach religion. The latest step in this process was the elimination of prayers and Christmas programs, and the ultimate step may be the prohibition of the mention of God.

The resulting, almost completely secularized (and some claim atheistic) public school system of today is what stimulates many voucher advocates to propose what they do. They see the public school system as teaching few moral values, and what are taught are considered "bland" or "neutral." Education should be more complete, they argue, leading to a more "rounded" individual. The teaching of moral values should be integrated with the teaching of secular subjects, much as was done in the early public schools, nearly all of which taught the religious philosophy of one denomination or another. A voucher system, in this view, would allow a return to a more complete educational experience by allowing religious and other concerned groups to incorporate stronger value systems into the teaching of secular subjects.

Furthermore, some proponents argue, the founding fathers would probably disagree with the current interpretation of the First Amendment that prohibits government aid for religiously permeated education. (The First Amendment reads, "Congress shall make no law

respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . .") This interpretation, they continue, was originally designed by Protestants to keep Catholic teachings out of the public school system.

It is no surprise, then, that Catholics have consistently argued for public aid for parochial education. Several different legal arguments have been developed, including the child-benefit theory and the contract theory. (For details, see the discussion of church-state conflict in the chapter on possible problems.) Recently, the arguments have begun to be heard, possibly signalling what Denis Doyle has called "an ebbing of the powerful anti-Catholic prejudices of the WASP establishment."

Recent Development

The voucher idea resurfaced in modern times in the 1950s, when, after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), several southern states enacted voucher programs to avoid desegregation. All were declared unconstitutional, however, when the courts perceived the programs' discriminatory intent.

Another stimulus came from Virgil C. Blum, a Jesuit priest and professor of education at Marquette University, who in a 1958 book *(Freedom of Choice in Education)* advocated vouchers and tuition tax credits as means of supporting religious schools constitutionally.

In the 1960s, parochial school groups attempted to get several northern states to adopt unregulated voucher plans. These attempts, however, were generally unsuccessful. (The most recent attempt of this type was the voucher initiative on the 1978 Michigan ballot, which was also defeated.)

The most important stimulus of this period came from Milton Friedman who, beginning in the fifties, began promoting vouchers as a means of breaking up

the public monopoly on education, using the same arguments as his predecessors Paine and Mill.

Friedman's theory, rooted in the traditional philosophy of laissez faire economics, found favor within the Nixon administration. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) began to study the voucher idea in the late sixties. OEO's mission, according to La Noue, had been "redefined by President Nixon from that of a large-scale funder of community action programs to that of a smaller budget experimenter with social reform."

In late 1969, the OEO commissioned the Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP) in Cambridge (headed by Christopher Jencks) to study the feasibility of a voucher experiment. The center's resulting report (*Education Vouchers: A Report on Financing Elementary Education by Grants to Parents*, December 1970) outlined eleven possible voucher models and discussed the wide range of problems that would be encountered were a voucher system instituted. An experiment was recommended to test the voucher idea using one of the models, the regulated-compensatory model.

The CSPP report, though cautious in tone, unleashed a storm of opposition. Critics raised specters of increased segregation by race and class, public funding of sectarian schools, the end of teacher unions, and the loss of administrators' control over their schools. But, as Cohen and Farrar have put it, "A curious collection of conservative theorists, radical reformers, Republican politicians, and social experimenters . . . managed to persevere under the banner of science." The result of this perseverance was the Alum Rock voucher experiment, described later in more detail.

The School Finance Reform Movement

Another educational movement that began to pick

up momentum in the sixties was the school finance reform movement. In 1971, the movement achieved its first real victory with the *Serrano* decision in California, which declared that the property-tax basis of financing public education

> violated equal protection guarantees of State Constitution by conditioning availability of school revenues upon district wealth, with resultant disparities in school revenue, and by making quality of education dependent upon level of district expenditure. . .

Several other states have followed California's lead in declaring their school financing systems unconstitutional.

The school finance reform movement is of concern in a discussion of voucher systems because many of the same issues are involved in both. One of the purposes of a voucher system would be to equalize educational opportunity. School finance reform has the same aim, though the *Serrano* decision dealt only with equalizing educational spending. Recently, the school finance reform movement has moved in the direction of equalizing opportunity as well, for example, by providing more money for urban education, which costs more and is more difficult. Several of the recently proposed voucher models also have "compensatory" features to equalize opportunity.

Some voucher proposals (such as the CSPP model) do not address "where the money comes from." Others, such as the Coons-Sugarman "Family Power Equalizing" model and the recent Michigan voucher initiative, are more wide-ranging, calling for the abolishment of the property tax and a restructuring of school finance.

In fact, John Coons and Stephen Sugarman were heavily involved in school tax studies in the 1960s and only gradually developed their voucher ideas. To them, vouchers and school finance reform are part and parcel of the same educational reform movement.

Coons and Sugarman are important figures in the voucher movement of the seventies. Since helping to lay

the foundation for the landmark *Serrano* decision in 1971, they have been continually developing and promoting their voucher proposals (even in the lull of voucher advocacy in the midseventies, when the Alum Rock experiment was floundering). In June 1978, after the passage of Proposition 13, they helped to organize a group that may succeed in putting a voucher initiative on the 1980 California ballot. This initiative is discussed in detail in the chapter on proposed models.

IMPLEMENTATION OF VOUCHER CONCEPTS TO DATE

Experience with education vouchers at the precollege level has been very limited in this country. Even the Alum Rock experiment—originally designed specifically to test voucher theory—was attenuated to such a degree that it ended up testing few components of the theory. But experience with the implementation of some elements of voucher theory has been gained in other areas.

For example, several government-aid programs—such as the food stamp program and the G.I. Bill—incorporate voucher principles to varying degrees. And in other countries—particularly Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands—there are long traditions of public support for diverse educational alternatives. Finally, the growth of the alternative school movement within the public system is providing useful experience with some elements of voucher theory.

This chapter begins with an analysis of government-aid programs that operate according to voucher principles, followed by an examination of the Free-School system of Denmark. Next, the alternative school movement in this country is discussed; and, finally, the Alum Rock experiment is analyzed.

Existing Government Voucher Programs

Currently, several government-aid programs—providing food, housing, day care, health care, and higher education—work according to voucher principles. There is a clear trend toward allowing the recipients of public aid to choose their providers from among those in the private sector, as opposed to having the government be the sole provider. Vouchers—

although they may not be called that in the aid programs—are the mechanisms being used to provide this recipient choice.

The clearest example of this is the food stamp program, in which those who qualify are given "food vouchers" that they may use to buy the food products of their choice at the retail outlet of their choice. Formerly, the government distributed the food itself, which, besides denying the recipients both diversity and choice, set up a food-delivery system that was redundant alongside the existing private distributors. The present system allows the recipients and not government officials to decide what they should eat.

To be sure, there are choice-limiting restrictions—primarily the size of the food stamp allotment—and the recipients do not always buy what is "best" in terms of nutritional value. But the point is that the food stamp program now provides only the means for food purchase, while the particulars of choice are left to the recipients. This arrangement, the argument continues, allows free-enterprise merchants and manufacturers to compete for food stamp dollars, resulting in greater efficiency and diversity. In contrast, a distribution system run by a bureaucracy, in which there is little motivation for individuals to improve or diversify their products, necessarily provides a standardized line of goods.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is another agency that is now engaged in giving public aid while maintaining recipient choice. In the HUD's housing allowance experiments, eligible families are receiving payments to make up the difference between the cost of adequate housing and their ability to pay. The recipients must find and secure their own housing on the open market. They have consumer clout because they can move whenever they wish and can withhold payment if landlords don't meet contract requirements. Although still in the

experimental stage, these housing allowance programs appear to be less expensive than direct delivery plans (housing projects or direct subsidies to landlords) for getting poor people into decent housing.

Another federal-aid policy that is favorable to recipient choice is the day care tax-credit provisions of the 1976 Tax Reform Act. Under this law, the federal government will pay one-fifth of a family's day care costs (with certain restrictions and limits) if the day care is needed so that the parent(s) can work. The family can choose the kind of providers and facilities it likes; relatives and neighbors may be hired, for example, and the day care can be provided either in or out of the home.

The Medicaid and Medicare programs are less clear-cut examples of voucher systems. Although recipients can choose their own hospitals, pharmacists, and doctors from among those in both the private and government sectors, several factors attenuate this voucher component. There is no incentive for patients to shop for the best price, because the government pays all "reasonable" costs. It is very difficult to compare the quality of health care from different providers. Also there is very little competition in the health care industry.

The G.I. Bill is the classic example of a government-aid program that allows public funds to be spent at a variety of public and private institutions. In this program, veterans are given tuition fees and a small subsistence allowance to attend the school of their choice (including denominational colleges). As Bridge (1977) explains, this program approaches a "true" voucher system for several reasons: there are many colleges in competition for clients; there is a great diversity of colleges offering a wide array of programs and specialties; recipients are willing to travel away from home to go to school, thus increasing the number of institutions to be chosen from; and the vouchers do not

pay the recipients' full costs, so there is an incentive to shop for the best educational buy.

There are other instances of experimentation with voucher systems as well. For example, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has been experimenting with a cultural voucher idea in New York City, in which diverse community groups receive vouchers to spend at their choice of a variety of cultural institutions. And in Portland, Oregon, a voucher experiment was conducted between 1973 and 1976 to test the feasibility of vouchering vocational training for clients of the Work Incentive Program.

The Free Schools of Denmark

Some school systems, both in other countries and within the United States, have been offering choice in elementary and secondary education for decades. In parts of Vermont and New Hampshire, there are several "nonoperating" school districts. Instead of operating their own schools or incorporating with another district, certain communities agree to pay each local student's tuition at the private or public school of the family's choice in neighboring districts. Some students elect college-prep private schools, while others choose alternative schools or more traditional public schools. The system runs smoothly and has been operating for a long time.

In Denmark, there is a long tradition of publicly financed Free Schools, as described by Fuchs. A Free School can be founded by an organization, an individual, or a group of parents. The schools are inspected by the government and are required to provide instruction that is as good as the public schools in Danish and arithmetic. But beyond that, the Free Schools are allowed to pursue their own particular educational goals.

Thus, in Denmark, schools differing widely in

matters of religious training, educational goals, and pedagogical methodology are all state-supported. Despite this freedom, the vast majority of parents prefer the public schools, which, in addition to being of excellent quality, teach the Evangelical Lutheran state religion. As of 1969, only 7 percent of the children of compulsory school attendance age were enrolled in the Free Schools.

One positive effect of the Free School system is that it removes conflict from the public schools. Any dissident minority can leave the public schools and start its own school, with government funding. Within most Free Schools, there is great harmony among parents, teachers, and administrators, who most often share a common philosophy.

Of course, Denmark's school system has a very different history than the American system, and it serves a relatively homogeneous population. But the Danish experience supports the view that public financing of alternative schools need not be the death knell of government-run public schools.

The Free Schools are not financed with a voucher system, though the principle of public financing for private alternatives remains the same. The government pays 85 percent of staff members' salaries, pays 50 percent of what it would cost to keep the students in a public school, and provides low-interest loans for establishing school buildings (1969 data). Thus, choice is available to nearly all families, as is "consumer clout." Parents can shift their child and their tax dollars to an existing Free School, or they can start a new school, which requires an enrollment of only ten pupils.

Other nations besides Denmark provide public funding for nonpublic education (among others, the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Australia). But, as Swanson and Igoe state, "The arrangements found in each nation are the result of the interplay of many

factors, including the religious and ethnic composition of its population, its historical development, its governmental structure and the strength and character of its economic base."

In the United States, the solution will be particularly difficult, mainly because the population is so heterogeneous. Recently, more forms of public aid for parochial schools have been approved by the United States Supreme Court, and some predict that the Court may approve a voucher system, if structured properly. However, the recent rise of authoritarian religious sects (the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, the People's Temple) is bound to make public funding of religious education an unpopular topic.

Alternatives within the Present System

The school establishment has in recent years gained useful experience in implementing choice programs within the present school system. Open enrollment and magnet schools have been implemented to balance the distribution of students among a district's schools and to produce voluntary desegregation. In some areas, such programs have been implemented mainly in response to public, teacher, or administrative desires for alternatives. (Most often what are desired are either more "open" schools or more traditional "back-to-basics" schools.)

So there is a small body of collective experience with choice systems within the present school administration. But that limited knowledge would be wholly inadequate were a true voucher system implemented tomorrow.

One of the voucher theory debates has centered on whether an adequate program of alternatives can be offered through the present public school system (an "internal" voucher system in the words of Fantini), or whether it is necessary to transcend the present public

school system and implement a true free-market system (an "external" voucher system) to get the range of diversity and choice that voucher proponents say everyone wants. The following discussion centers on this issue.

The recent rise of educational alternatives within the public system undoubtedly has many causes, but one stimulus for the movement may well have been the threat of voucher system implementation. Christopher Jencks told the writer in a telephone interview that "one of the main consequences of the earlier OEO-NIE voucher experiment was that the public schools were quite scared of the idea and responded by saying, 'Well, we can have alternatives, too.' And although we got very little experimentation with vouchers as a result of the OEO-NIE initiative, we did get quite a lot more alternatives in the public schools." Speaking of the Coons-Sugarman voucher initiative, Jencks added that "if every school district in California were offering the kinds of alternatives that Alum Rock or Berkeley had offered, I don't think there'd be anything like the demand there is for this kind of scheme."

The original capitalist argument seems particularly fitting here: the public school system, enjoying an effective monopoly, can afford to be unresponsive to public demands, because there are no alternatives for most consumers of education; faced with a real threat to its survival, such as the implementation of a voucher system, the school system suddenly finds within itself the flexibility that the public has been demanding.

Mario Fantini, in a book published in 1976, stated:

> The threat of having a voucher that would stimulate alternative schools *outside* the framework of public education has encouraged a movement for alternatives *within* the public schools themselves. Ironically, as an external threat, vouchers have helped to generate an internal reform effort, thus fulfilling in part their original purpose.

The message for school administrators seems clear:

either offer diversity and choice within the public system in response to public demand, or face replacement of that system with something perhaps as radical as a voucher system.

According to Fantini, if an "external" voucher system were implemented on a wide scale, the loss for society might be great:

> Public schools have gone through a number of important stages to insure that they would be non-sectarian and non-exclusive, and that they would reflect the basic values of an open, free society. Public schools are mature enough, strong enough to withstand any pressures that might attempt to compromise these values. These professional pressures are critical to the control of schools that might be bent on undermining the basic values of a free society. The point here is that public schools—subject to public scrutiny as they are—are more capable of representing our noblest values than many of our more exclusive private schools. Thus, a quick rise in private sector education without adequate supervision and monitoring might, in the name of responsiveness, create educational structures which would not serve the basic societal values that support a free society.

In direct opposition to this view are the opinions of leading voucher proponents Coons and Sugarman. In their recently published book, *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control*, they argue for public support of any educational option, no matter how radical, without the moderating effect of a common, public school system overseeing it all. They admit the possibility that Birchite schools could be formed that might "stimulate fascism and threaten the very liberality that gave it scope." They doubt that this would ever happen, though, and instead believe quite the opposite: "family choice should diminish the threat from violent and totalitarian ideologies and should support rather than erode consensus."

They contend that the current public school system teaches much more than a simple consensus supporting our political institutions. The schools actually impreg-

nate in all students one set of values—predominantly white, upper-class, Protestant.

Their answer to this dilemma is public support of whatever educational alternative each family prefers. The new school system they envision would have to be wider than the present WASP-dominated system because of the limitations on alternatives that would inevitably be imposed were the same old administrators in control.

Each school, of course, would be required to teach a minimum of common subjects, but "beyond this bare minimum the content would be whatever individual schools and teachers offer that satisfies families." The new national consensus that would develop, it seems, would be based primarily on a simple respect for others' differences. As Coons and Sugarman put it, "Official rejection of family values is likely to generate dissensus; educational liberty is likely to cement a stronger political bond among our diverse peoples."

Demand for a more diverse range of alternatives within the public system will likely increase in the future. Most of the public alternatives so far tried have varied mainly in educational philosophy and have not strayed too far into ideological areas. (The farthest may be the Environmental Outdoor School in Eugene, Oregon, in which environmental concerns provide the focus for the entire curriculum.) Under some proposed voucher plans, however, any group could set up a publicly funded school to indoctrinate children with their particular ideology.

A detailed description of alternative schools will not be attempted here, because the subject lies outside the main focus of this digest. (For more information, see Fantini and Mazzarella.) One alternative school experiment, though, does deserve special attention, because it was initially intended to be an education voucher experiment.

Alum Rock

The most notable thing about the Alum Rock voucher experiment was that it failed to test most of the aspects of voucher theory that it set out to test. This is not to say it was without value, for it did provide experience with alternatives within the public system, and it did indicate some of the administrative problems that might be faced by other districts changing to a voucher system.

In 1970, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) began looking for school districts in which to test the "regulated compensatory" voucher model recommended by Christopher Jencks and the Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP) in Cambridge. The voucher idea, however, had little grassroots or administrative support. Six districts eventually agreed to conduct OEO-funded feasibility studies, but only one—the Alum Rock district in San Jose, California—decided to go along with the experiment, and then just barely. "The ensuing story," state Cohen and Farrar, "illuminates a problem that has plagued so many federal agencies and faddish foundations: how to produce political reform in somebody else's town with only bright ideas, some outside consultants, and a little free cash."

When the experiment began in 1972, Alum Rock—a poor, semirural, largely Mexican-American community—was in poor financial shape and was attracted to the lure of big federal money. (Eventually, the district received $9 million.) In addition, many of the district's administrators wanted to decentralize the school system, and the voucher experiment was seen as a means to that end.

The OEO's position was getting to be a bit desperate, also. By the spring of 1972, OEO either had to find a district that would attempt the voucher experiment or lose its funds for the experiment altogether. As a result, OEO accepted a very compromised voucher experiment

in a district that was neither ideal for the experiment nor really interested in parental power, educational choice, or competition.

A complicating factor was that the California legislature had failed to pass legislation in the fall of 1971 that would have permitted the participation of private schools in the experiment. So the initial experimental model was a "transitional" model that didn't include private schools. (Not that it would have mattered very much: even after the enabling legislation was passed in the fall of 1973, only one private school attempted to participate, but this newly founded school died aborning for lack of public interest in it.)

The agreement finally reached between the OEO and Alum Rock was, in the words of Rand researcher Eliot Levinson,

> tentative, ambiguous, and potentially open to misunderstandings. . . . The ambiguity allowed OEO the opportunity to get a foot in the door with the hope that in the future the program would become more voucher-like. At the same time it allowed Alum Rock to accept the money without having to be too accountable for specific ways of using it.

In the end, Alum Rock was the big winner. They got a big injection of federal money and the decentralization that they had wanted. The OEO, however, never did get a real voucher system going: the transition to a full-scale model never took place. Among the specific problems were these: no private school ever participated; the school board could not legally relinquish its control of any of its schools; parental participation was much lower than anticipated; and teachers were guaranteed job security as part of the compromise, but at the same time their salaries were not influenced by their performance in the classroom.

What resulted was not so much a test of voucher theory, but rather an experiment with alternative schools. Of Alum Rock's twenty-five elementary and middle schools, fourteen participated in the program.

In each of the fourteen schools, between two and five minischools were set up, differing either in teaching style (traditional, open, learning by doing) or curriculum (back-to-basics, mathematics/science, fine arts, bilingual/bicultural). Parents could choose any minischool in the district, and free transportation was provided. Parents received information each spring on the schools' offerings for the coming fall, as well as historical data on student performance and resource allocation.

The Alum Rock experience, however, did shed some light, however diffuse, on voucher issues. It has provided useful information, for example, on the issues to be faced in implementing a voucher system in an established public system. More importantly, perhaps, it has indicated that, as Leary quotes one close observer of Alum Rock, "No bureaucracy will willingly yield up its power over the purse. A true voucher test won't occur until it is mandated by political forces outside the school district." At Alum Rock, local forces simply overpowered federal priorities.

Another insight gained from the experiment is that teachers like freedom to set up their own curriculum, but they don't like competition. At Alum Rock, teachers worked with others who shared their educational philosophy and were given more freedom to arrange their working conditions. Levinson has observed, though, that they reacted adversely to competition with their peers and to uncertainty about enrollment.

Parents at Alum Rock apparently became more satisfied with their schools. But, as Cohen and Farrar point out, this was not because they gained any power, as was originally intended. Instead, they were happier and more interested simply because they had more educational alternatives. In addition, these alternatives "were provided by professionals in authoritative and familiar ways—without much work for parents."

Another important indication from the Alum Rock

experiment is that family choice in schooling may in fact have increased social stratification. At Alum Rock, wealthier, better-educated, white-collar families tended to choose less structured minischools for their children, while working-class parents chose more structured, traditional programs.

Working-class parents have learned through their job experiences that obedience to an external authority is important to their job security and success, says Gary Bridge, a Rand researcher who has been studying family choice at Alum Rock. On the other hand, states Bridge (1977), "people in middle class occupations perform tasks which require them to make independent judgments according to general principles as opposed to set routines, and they typically operate with little direct supervision." Thus, white-collar workers choose more "open" schools that stress individual autonomy and decision-making.

The result is that "parents pass their class-related learning on to their children, because they believe that it will help them achieve 'success' as they know it." A voucher system designed for parental choice, then, may provide even less class mixing than the public system and ultimately may lead to a net decrease in social mobility. (This problem is discussed more fully in the chapter on possible problems.)

When the Alum Rock demonstration began, parental satisfaction with the public schools was high, and there were few calls for change. It is not surprising, then, that there was virtually no parental protest when the experiment was terminated in the spring of 1977. The schools now offer about the same programs they did before the experiment, but the district has retained open enrollment and free busing.

Later this year, the final, government-funded Rand analysis should be released *(A Study of Alternatives in American Education).* Of the six volumes of this study, two have been released to date (February 1979).

PROPOSED MODELS

Although educational voucher models share some common themes, central among which is family choice, they differ in many more ways than they agree. One important issue concerns which schools may participate. Should participation be limited to public schools (attenuating the free-market principle), or to public schools and nonsectarian private schools (thus avoiding possible church-state conflict), or should all public and private schools be allowed to participate?

Concerning the quality of education, should there be a minimum of common knowledge (language, math, and so forth) that all schools teach? If so, what should this minimum be? Beyond the minimum, should the state be concerned with the moral and ethical values that each school is promoting?

Another issue is whether or not all vouchers should be of the same value. If not, according to what factors (family wealth, difficulty of educating child, geographical location) should vouchers differ in value? Whether or not the vouchers are equal, should parents be allowed to add their own dollars to the voucher if the chosen school charges additional tuition?

Some voucher proponents further complicate the voucher concept by extending their reform proposals beyond the main concern of voucher theory (delivery of education) to include the financing of education. Thus, some plans call for the abolishment of the property tax for education, while others would charge families for vouchers on a sliding scale according to income.

Friedman's Unregulated Voucher Plan

The voucher proposal of Milton Friedman (called by some the "guru of education vouchers") would end

direct government support of public schools altogether. Each child of school age would receive a voucher equal in value to the average per-pupil cost of public education in his area. Every voucher would be of equal value, but parents would be able to supplement the vouchers with their own dollars, and schools could charge whatever tuition they wanted. Private schools would specialize and offer alternative modes of education in order to attract students. To prevent hucksterism and poor quality, though, each school would have to be certified by a government agency. Unpopular or poor-quality schools would go out of business as dissatisfied parents took their vouchers elsewhere.

Friedman (1973) visualizes a multitude of new schools popping up, some run by voluntary organizations such as the Boy Scouts or the YMCA, others run by "highly capitalized chain schools, like supermarkets." Another Friedman idea is the divisible voucher, which could be spent at a variety of institutions if desired, much as groceries are now bought at a variety of stores.

Inclusion of parochial schools might be a problem, if the Supreme Court decides it is unconstitutional. But Friedman notes that there is a leaning toward greater parochiaid by some members of the Court. Furthermore, says Friedman, government aid programs such as the G.I. Bill and the welfare program, which allow government funds to flow to educational institutions, have not been seriously challenged. "I believe," states Friedman (1973), "that the penalty now imposed on parents who do not send their children to public schools produces a *real* violation of the spirit of the First Amendment. . . . The penalty abridges the religious freedom of parents who do not accept the liberal, humanistic religion of the public schools."

Friedman also admits that a voucher system permitting participation by private schools would increase the total (public) cost of education, but would at least end "the inequity of using tax funds to school some children

but not others." Friedman's answer to the greater cost of education is simply to make the vouchers smaller, requiring schools to economize and parents to make up the difference out of their own pockets.

The racial issue is even less of a problem for Friedman. Instead of increasing racial and class separation, voucher systems "would have precisely the opposite effect. . . . Let schools specialize, as private schools would, and the pull of common interest will overcome the pull of color, leading, I believe, to far more rapid integration than is now in process. . . ."

The possibility that his voucher plan might lead to even wider differences in school expenditures also does not worry Friedman. His primary social goal, he states, is freedom, not equality—though he would welcome equality as "a desirable by-product" of a free society.

Despite Friedman's valorous attempts to defend his idealistic voucher notion, criticisms are easily leveled against it. The most common are that the plan would foster socioeconomic segregation and that public schools would become the dumping ground for poor children.

The Sizer-Whitten Model

The voucher plan proposed by Sizer and Whitten is on the border of what can justly be called a voucher model and will be discussed only briefly here. Actually, it is better thought of as a supplement to the existing system rather than as a replacement for it.

Under this plan, each family whose income is below the national average would be given a voucher for each child of school age. The vouchers' values would vary with income, poorer families receiving larger vouchers. The private and public school systems would function as they now do, except that any school could accept poor children and their vouchers.

The idea, of course, is that poorer children, with

their sizable vouchers, would become desirable clients instead of unwanted burdens. Schools would compete for their attendance because compensatory money would follow the disadvantaged children.

The "Poor Children's Bill of Rights," as Sizer and Whitten have called their plan, is undeveloped as a voucher model, but it does illustrate a common goal of modern voucher plans—the equalization of educational opportunity by spending more for the education of the poor and disadvantaged. In particular, this proposal is aimed squarely at the education problems of the urban poor.

Equalization provisions are also popular elements of the Regulated Compensatory and Coons-Sugarman models, reviewed later in this chapter.

Vouchers Confined to the Public System

Fantini (1976) notes that there are presently many school personnel who feel constrained by the public system and are waiting for a "new framework for action." This framework, he states, could come into being from internal pressure to change the ground rules for professional action: "Considerable inside professional energy could be channeled from trying to improve a single educational process to working out alternative forms of education within the basic framework of public schools."

Fantini sees many advantages in working within the present system. For one, "the public schools already have the manpower, the mechanisms, and the knowledge to deliver such a new supply system of safeguarded options at no extra cost to the taxpayers." Another is that the public schools are presently nonsectarian and nonexclusive, and they "reflect the basic values of an open, free society."

However, Fantini seems to elude discussing the arguments that the public schools teach their own

brand of "liberal, humanistic religion," and that any alternatives originating within them would reflect the same underlying values. Critics of Fantini and the current system claim that real diversity cannot be achieved within the public system, and that the stimulus for change must come from without.

As far as a specific voucher system goes, Fantini has no detailed plans for one. He is a firm believer in family choice in education, however, and supports the notion of a consumer-dominated market system within the public system, with schools growing and shrinking in response to public demand.

The report by the Center for the Study of Public Policy discusses two forms of internal voucher systems. In the first, the school district would develop a system of alternatives within the public district, running parallel to the existing neighborhood schools. The second system would be the same as the first, except that the district would contract with groups in the private sector to run the schools.

In both kinds of systems, the board of education would retain ultimate control of the program by deciding "what kinds of innovation should receive public subsidy and what kinds should not. Both models are therefore attractive to many professional educators, and unattractive to many who distrust the educational profession."

The Regulated, Compensatory Model

The Center for the Study of Public Policy examined a total of eleven possible voucher models, including the three discussed above. The model the center ended up favoring, and the one the OEO attempted to implement at Alum Rock, is called the regulated, compensatory model. This model, although embodying the libertarian ideal of choice, is heavily weighted toward egalitarian principles.

Under this plan, each child would receive a voucher roughly equal in value to the per-pupil cost of education in the local, public schools. No participating schools, public or private, could charge more than the value of the voucher for tuition, though schools could increase expenditures by seeking support from churches or federal agencies and foundations. All schools would have to accept all applicants, unless there were more applicants than spaces, in which case at least half of the matriculants would be chosen by lot. Disadvantaged or poor children would be given compensatory vouchers in addition to the regular vouchers to make them more attractive clients and to reimburse the schools who accepted them for the extra cost of educating them.

A consumer information system would be established, and participating schools would have to meet the eligibility requirements of an accrediting and overseeing Education Voucher Agency (EVA). The EVA would not run any schools itself, but would be locally controlled and would receive and distribute local, state, and federal funds for education. The EVA would also distribute vouchers and consumer information to parents and see to it that transportation was provided for every student who needed it.

One result of the implementation of such a system, stated Christopher Jencks in 1970, would be to free education from the monopolistic public system. He said, "The state, the local board, and the school administration establish regulations to ensure that no school will do anything to offend anyone of political consequence. By trying to please everyone, however, the schools often end up pleasing no one."

It seems that Jencks may have fallen into the same trap. His plan contained elements of conservative laissez faire economics as well as many requirements for bureaucratic interference. As a result, the plan was blasted from both the right and the left. According to Doyle,

It is ironic that the task of designing an operational model of a voucher scheme was given to Jencks, as far left on the political spectrum as Friedman is on the right. It is doubly ironic that Jencks never escaped the conservative association of vouchers, for he found his report the object of as much liberal criticism as Friedman had before; and he gained little or no conservative support.

The results of the attempted implementation of the regulated, compensatory model in Alum Rock are discussed in the preceding chapter.

The Coons Sugarman Model

Undoubtedly the voucher proposal of greatest current interest, at least in California, is the "Family Choice" model that John Coons and others are attempting to put on the 1980 California ballot through the initiative petition process. The next section of this chapter will discuss the voucher initiative and its chances of passage. This section will discuss the backgrounds of Coons and his colleague Stephen Sugarman and will outline their earlier "Family Power Equalizing" voucher model.

Coons's interest in vouchers had its origins in the early sixties, when he was teaching law at Northwestern. He examined the school districts in Illinois and found large disparities between what urban and suburban districts were spending per pupil on education. With a Russell Sage Foundation grant, Coons took on two associates—William W. Clune and Stephen Sugarman—and the group began analyzing school finance and school policy reform. In 1970 they published a constitutional argument *(Private Wealth and Public Education)* "that could, where adopted, eliminate wealth discrimination among public schools while enhancing the traditional systems of local control and governance." The arguments in this book and in their amicus curiae briefs to the Supreme Court of California

are said to have laid much of the theoretical foundation for the court's *Serrano* decision in 1971.

As their ideas progressed, Coons and Sugarman gradually came to the position that political power in education should be in the hands of individual families. As Sugarman recently recounted in a *Commonweal* article (see Leary),

> We came to our ideas about parental power backwards. We were heavily involved in those school tax studies. But step by step we came to the position that parents, not school districts, ought to be deciding how to spend money for education. Parents know, better than school professionals, what their own children need. Parents care more. We came to see that the present public school structure is too limiting for children.

Their most recent book *(Education by Choice)* presents a modified version of their earlier "Family Power Equalizing" model, which they have now dubbed the "Quality Choice" model. The book also discusses child-benefit theory (at length), the issues of consensus and integration, and the various administrative, fiscal, and pedagogical devices needed in a system of family choice.

The Family Power Equalizing voucher model, published in 1971, was described by the authors as "a serious policy proposal for a substantial legislative experiment" in financing California schools. The model was based on the proposition that the quality of public education in the state should be a function only of the wealth of the state as a whole, the same principle adopted by the *Serrano* court.

Under this plan, each family would choose a school (either public or private) for their child according to both the school's approach to education and the school's tuition level. Each school could choose to charge one of four tuition levels.

In return, each individual family would be taxed according to the tuition level of the school it picked *and*

according to the family income level. Thus wealthier families would pay more for the same level school, yet all families would have a choice of levels, and all would pay more for access to higher levels.

Education in this system would be financed partly by the special family tax described above, but the bulk of the system's funding would come from "general taxes at the state level." The local property tax for education would be abolished by the act.

Another important provision of the plan called for the transfer of educational authority from participating school districts to the state superintendent. But, the authors soothed, "the job rights of present employees of abolished districts would be given substantial protection" by provisions in the act. The state would also acquire each district's property and its fiscal obligations.

The Family Choice Education Initiative

The voucher initiative that Coons and CHOICE (Californians Helping to Organize for Individual Control of Education) are planning to put on the June 1980 California ballot is similar in some respects to the Family Power Equalizing scheme outlined above; however, there are several major differences. One of these differences is that the provision for the abolishment of the property tax for education has been deleted. Primarily, "it was deleted for simplicity reasons," said Coons in a telephone interview.

Also, the abolishment of the property tax is less of an issue now, since *Serrano* and Proposition 13. Essentially, *Serrano* declared the property-tax basis of financing schools unconstitutional, and the state has since been moving toward a more just (primarily more state-funded) system. Proposition 13 has pushed the state toward compliance with *Serrano* by effectively neutralizing the effects of the widely variable property

tax. For practical purposes, California now has a mandatory statewide property tax, while greater state funding of education has become a necessary reality.

The voucher initiative is designed to amend Article IX, Section 5 of the state constitution. Although lengthy, the initiative contains few specific details. The jobs of working out the details and putting the initiative into practice are assigned by the initiative to the legislature. The vagueness of the initiative, say its sponsors, allows it to be short enough to understand while leaving some flexibility for changing conditions.

The initiative, it should be noted, has not yet taken its final form. The CHOICE group is still discussing the initiative, but the final version is expected to be very similar to earlier drafts. Coons predicted in a February 14 interview that the final version would be out by about March 15. This writer is working with the most recent draft, dated December 11. Even if the final version were out, however, it would be very difficult to predict the outcomes of its adoption because the details of the proposal must be worked out by the legislature.

The initiative would establish three classes of schools—public schools (as they now exist), public scholarship schools, and private scholarship schools (including parochial schools). The scholarship schools could redeem the scholarships, or vouchers, that would be provided to the parents of school-age children. The public schools would continue as they do now, and they could not redeem vouchers. Public scholarship schools would have to be nonprofit corporations, but private schools could be run for profit. Institutes of higher learning as well as school districts would be allowed to organize public scholarship schools.

The legislature is required by the initiative to assure that 30 percent of the state's elementary and secondary school children can enroll in scholarship schools by the beginning of the school year 1985-86. By 1984-85, one-half of the state's students must be eligible to receive

scholarships, and by 1985-86, three-fourths. Of course, this does not mean that three-fourths of the state's students will attend scholarship schools in 1985. It simply makes it possible for them to do so if desired.

The implementation of the scholarship system, then, is to be a gradual process. The public school system is not to be immediately jettisoned. In fact, the public system could continue to be the most favored schooling system, as it is in Denmark, despite the publicly funded Free School system. The sponsors' idea is to introduce the means for real choice, and at the same time give the public schools some publicly supported competition.

The scholarships themselves are to be "in an amount adequate for a thorough education and equal for every child of similar grade level and circumstance," except that the legislature can make the amount different on account of "age, curriculum, bilingualism, special needs, variations in local cost, need to encourage integrated schools, and other circumstances deemed appropriate."

There is a limit, however, on the value of the vouchers: "The average public cost per scholarship pupil shall approximate ninety percent of the average public cost in the same year of similar pupils enrolled in public schools." Public costs, in this calculation, include the costs of facilities and, at the discretion of the legislature, the costs of teacher retirement.

The initiative also includes a temporary tax cap (expiring in 1986) requiring that the total public cost of elementary and secondary education in the school years between 1982 and 1986 not exceed the cost in 1980-81, adjusted up or down according to annual changes in average personal income. The cap was included, said Coons in an interview, "to phase the system in in a prudent and controlled way" and to keep the total cost lower than the cost of the present system. After the cap goes off, Coons said that the total expenditures on edu-

cation might go up "because people might learn to like education again and therefore spend more." If the voucher initiative does not pass, however, Coons predicts that the middle class will begin a substantial exodus from the public system and vote much lower levels of support for the public schools. An exodus of 15 to 20 percent, added Coons, would be enough to have a tremendous impact on the capacity of the system to spend.

In addition to regular scholarships, any family could purchase "supplementary" scholarships at prices adjusted to family wealth and number of children. Thus the initiative embodies the gist of the "family power equalizing" principle described earlier, though it sets no limits on the tuition levels that can be charged. The initiative states only that "schools requiring a supplementary scholarship for admission shall require the same of all pupils," and that scholarship schools can accept no outside support.

The result is that each family would have its choice of types of schools and its choice of tuition levels. And if adjusted to family wealth, poor families should have as easy access to high-tuition-level schools as rich families. (A problem can be seen here, however. If a large number of poor families opt to buy state-subsidized supplementary scholarships, how will the state maintain the 90 percent limit on scholarship school spending?)

The initiative is very clear on the inclusion of parochial schools: "No school shall be ineligible to r[illegible]eem scholarships because it teaches moral values, p[illegible]osophy, or religion, but religion may not be taught in public schools or public scholarship schools." This, of course, is the initiative's most controversial provision, and opponents will undoubtedly jump forceably upon it. All the traditional arguments supporting the church-state wall will be brought up, while specters of publicly supported Nazi schools will be raised.

To redeem scholarships, schools must be certified by the state superintendent. The requirements are that the school must meet "the curricular standards imposed by law upon private schools on July 1, 1979," that it neither advocate unlawful behavior nor discriminate unlawfully in hiring, and that it disclose if required by the legislature such information as teachers' qualifications and pupils' achievement on standardized tests.

About collective bargaining, the initiative says only this: "Employees of public and private scholarship schools shall have the same right to organize and bargain collectively as those employed by public schools, provided that the bargaining unit shall not be larger than the employing school corporation."

In addition to the above, the initiative includes the following: a provision for the establishment of a "thorough system of information" concerning scholarship schools; a provision for the establishment of programs of loans or other capital aids "designed to promote the acquisition, creation, expansion or maintenance of educational facilities serving public educational objectives"; a sundown clause to terminate the program in 1999 if it is not popular; a "separability" clause allowing provisions held invalid under the federal Constitution (such as inclusion of parochial schools) to be deleted without affecting the rest of the initiative; a clause protecting pupil rights and requiring the legislature to set uniform standards for discipline and dismissal; and a provision covering admissions procedures (by lot if oversubscribed) and transportation (free within bounds set by superintendent).

The net effect of the initiative would be to give California a centralized state education system paralleling the traditional public system. At the same time, however, a great deal of decision-making power would be handed back to families. The traditional administrative

structure of education would be profoundly shaken: groups of administrators and teachers would band together and leave the public system to set up their own schools; administrators would in some cases be hired by teachers to run their schools, but in other cases would be the primary force behind schools' creation; education corporations would spring up offering a host of teaching styles and philosophies.

This shakeup of the public system would not bother John Coons at all—it is exactly what he is trying to achieve. He believes that the current public education system is stagnant and passe, inculcating "neutral" values and turning out bland conformists. The fault is not with the people running the system, but with the political structure of the system. As Coons told the writer, "What happens is that in a political mechanism you *do* have to steer a rather bland course among the various schools of personal values of different groups. And so you wind up naturally, and perhaps properly, not saying much about basic values."

The answer for Coons is to restructure the education system to allow the expression of a diversity of widely ranging philosophies—instead of only one bland, fully compromised philosophy. The idea, of course, goes back to the country's founding fathers who believed that the thousands of different factions given freedom of thought and speech would balance themselves out and lead, ultimately, to a richer culture and a stronger nation. Contrary to being divisive, freedom of education would be "an investment in cohesion," says Coons, because people will not feel crushed and frustrated by the system. "My experience," says Coons, "is that two people who are very different from each other but who both get treated with respect by society are more tolerant of each other."

Coons's call for complete freedom of choice in education is idealistic, but he apparently considers the risk of the rise of disruptive or anarchistic schools worth the

potential benefits of a free and diverse society.

What effect will the passage of Proposition 13 have on the voucher initiative? Some think it may take the punch out of the proposal—Proposition 13 will speed compliance with *Serrano* and, theoretically, much of the inequity in school finance that has been feeding voter dissatisfaction will disappear. Others believe Proposition 13 is only the first step in a middle-class revolt against government. In this scenario, voters will further cap or even decrease government taxing and spending, use the savings to opt out of monolithic government programs that they are dissatisfied with—particularly education—and spend their money instead in the private sector.

CHOICE, the group that is promoting the initiative, was formed shortly after the Proposition 13 victory in June 1978. "In fact," says Jack McCurdy, the education writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, "Coons and Sugarman got their idea for the voucher initiative from Proposition 13." CHOICE plans to conduct a grass-roots campaign very similar to the Proposition 13 effort, feeding off voter dissatisfaction with government and the promises of freedom to choose and individual power that the voucher plan would bring.

First, however, the group will attempt to have the legislature put the initiative on the June 1980 ballot. But they realize that there is little chance of this, since education lobbying groups, especially the California Teachers Association (CTA), will most probably block the effort.

The CTA, though, might not be as virulently opposed as predicted if members take the time to read the history of Alum Rock and find out that teachers ended up the big winners, especially in terms of professionalism. Currently, however, the CTA is dead set against the idea. In McCurdy's *Los Angeles Times* article, Ralph Flynn, CTA's executive secretary, said that his union will be out to defeat the initiative "whatever the cost."

Chances for the initiative's passage are hard to predict. The mere complexity of the initiative will make it easy to take issue with. Proponents, it should be noted, will be forced to defend all parts of the initiative, while opponents will need only a single feature to attack. Additionally, the complexity may simply confuse voters and cause them to vote against the proposed change.

Historically, say Berke, Shalala and Williams, constitutional amendments put on the ballot by initiative petition are rarely adopted (10 percent in the period of 1964-71). In contrast, amendments put on the ballot by state legislatures stand a much better chance (67 percent in 1964-71), mainly because such propositions are already compromise packages, in which the opposing factions have come to some balance.

The situation in California, however, demands more careful analysis. Already the public has opted for one radical constitutional amendment, and that could be just the beginning. Dissatisfaction with government seems to grow daily, and voucher power, choice, and diversity are attractive concepts. In addition, California seems to have a better appetite than most states for complex constitutional amendments.

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

The problems facing the voucher concept today are both numerous and serious. There is evidence, for example, that a choice system might promote socioeconomic segregation. Another serious problem is that a voucher system may tread on the country's long-standing interpretation of church-state separation. Less profound but still important problems involve the mechanics of voucher system operation, such as organization, cost, and possibility of fraud. Such a plethora of potential problems is to be expected, however, whenever a change as deep and far-reaching as an education voucher system is proposed.

Church-State Conflict

Undoubtedly the most controversial issue in the voucher plan debate is that of the inclusion of parochial schools.

The main legal argument used to support the validity of voucher plans is the child-benefit theory, which states that public monies would be going to the child for the benefit of the child, and that religious organizations would benefit only indirectly. This argument is a strong one and may in fact hold up under Supreme Court scrutiny—depending of course on the composition of the Court. Close relatives of the child-benefit theory are already recognized and operable in government.

For example, money given to veterans under the G.I. Bill and to welfare recipients under Social Security can be spent at sectarian institutions if desired. In fact, Blum points out that, as of 1958, the federal government had spent millions of dollars for the education of no fewer than 36,000 veterans studying to become ministers of religion. Yet no First Amendment objection has

been raised. Likewise, thousands of welfare recipients buy their needs from denominational institutions.

The child-benefit theory as expressed in voucher plans has not yet been tested by the Supreme Court; however, the Court has recently been granting more forms of parochiaid based on this theory. In addition to textbooks and busing, the Court has recently (1977) approved standardized testing and scoring, diagnostic services, and therapeutic services provided in mobile units. These allowances are carefully designed to prevent "church-state entanglement," but they do indicate a softening of the Court's stance toward parochiaid.

The most ironic thing about the church-state issue in the voucher debate is that Catholic leaders are rather dubious about the whole affair. For one, the Catholics are worried that public control might follow public support. Even the Coons voucher initiative requires a minimum level of state control that might make parochial schools wary.

The voucher plan, in addition, is much more than the parochials are asking. Instead of the full funding that vouchers would supply, the parochials want only a helping hand, more in the line of the tuition tax credit scheme. Furthermore, a reduced level of funding would help avoid accusations that vouchers were advancing religion instead of secular education.

Segregation

One of the biggest worries about voucher proposals is that they may lead to greater segregation. If whites and blacks are completely free to choose their schools, the argument goes, integration will go to ruin. This is a particularly valid concern in the South, where in the fifties and sixties four states (Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana) passed unregulated voucher plans clearly designed to promote segregation. All were declared unconstitutional. It is really no surprise, then,

that most black leaders have been lukewarm about the voucher proposals of the seventies.

The Coons initiative seems to be rather mixed on the question of discrimination. One section states that "parents or guardians may enroll their children of school age in any public or private scholarship school subject to the right of every such school to set its total capacity and to limit applications to children of either sex." But the next section states that "pupils attending any common school shall be protected against discrimination *therein* on the basis of race, religion, or sex" (emphasis added). Thus, it appears that schools could discriminate in admissions (on the basis of sex), but not thereafter.

In *Education by Choice* (1978), Coons and Sugarman do little to alleviate the fears of some that choice might lead to social fragmentation. Diversity and choice are panaceas for Coons and Sugarman, melting away the deep historical and human forces that provoke segregation and discrimination, while somehow creating a new consensus based primarily on mutual respect for others' differences.

Although Coons and Sugarman have never bluntly supported discrimination by schools, their writings lean in this direction. For example, in a section entitled "Admission Policies" in *Education by Choice*, the authors state, "assuming that schools need not take all comers, we must consider methods and criteria schools might wish to employ in making selections."

Friedman and Coons are both willing to accept regulations to prevent segregation, but both believe that integration will naturally occur in a system of choice. "Let schools specialize, as private schools would," says Friedman (1973), "and the pull of common interest will overcome the pull of color." Coons has much the same view, only he adds that segregation by belief or culture is acceptable as long as it is, in reality, freely chosen.

Perhaps choice will enhance racial integration, per-

haps it will not. Presently, however, the debate on the matter is uncomplicated by many facts. According to Greeley (1977), "We do not know what effect freedom of educational choice would have on racial integration. We will not know until careful and elaborate social experiments are attempted to measure the results of some kind of voucher system."

There is some evidence that freedom of choice may contribute to increased segregation by social class. Bridge (1977) has noted some correlation between social class and choice of educational program at Alum Rock. Upper-class parents chose "open education" programs that emphasized independence, imagination, self-sufficiency, and decision-making, while working-class families preferred traditional programs emphasizing obedience to external authority. Findings such as this, especially if corroborated by further experiments, are definitely of concern.

But, ask voucher proponents, would the resulting economic-class segregation really be any worse than it is now in the cities and their suburbs, with different economic classes segregated by residence and thus by school? Friedman (1973) argues that in the large cities the public school has fostered economic-class stratification "by tying the kind and the cost of schooling to residential location." Furthermore, a voucher system would help make residential areas more heterogeneous, because residence and school attended would become unlinked.

Another possible problem related to the economic-class segregation issue is that once the voucher system gets rolling, it may be subverted by a middle class intent on escaping desegregation and maintaining public support for private education. As Christopher Jencks has stated (in McCurdy), "You may set in motion a political process that no one can turn off."

The trouble, Jencks told the writer, is that a voucher system would blur the distinction between public and

private schools. Voucher schools would be partially public—supported by public funds and open to the public—and partially private—set up and run by private interest groups. Thus, it would become the norm for private schools to have a claim on public funds.

Once the process gets cranked up on a large scale—once private schools get going and have a constituency and a consumer demand—the private schools may become increasingly like traditional, elitist private schools (not open to the public at large). Even though regulations are incorporated to prevent this, they may be eroded over time. But this erosion would be much more difficult, Jencks added, if the regulations were part of a constitutional amendment.

Cost of Education

No voucher proponent whom this writer has read has claimed that vouchers would reduce the total cost of education. In fact, many have implied or stated that they would like to see the total expenditures for education increase.

Certainly, paying the tuitions of students now attending private schools will increase the public cost of education, as will providing transportation for most students. The answer in the California voucher initiative is to make the average per-pupil cost of scholarships in the voucher schools equivalent to only 90 percent of the average per-pupil cost in the public schools. This 10 percent difference would make up for most of the extra tuition costs, proponents claim.

Of course, the implementation of a voucher system will undoubtedly cost a lot of money. After the transition with its concommitant extra costs, however, it is impossible to tell whether a voucher system would on the whole cost more or less than the present system.

As noted earlier, Coons thinks that after the temporary spending cap of the initiative goes off in 1986, the

total cost of education might increase "because people might learn to like education again." Friedman (1973) thinks that after the implementation of a voucher system, "parents who now send their children to nonpublic schools might be more favorable to higher public expenditures for schooling."

Michael Kirst, president of the California State Board of Education, thinks that the school finance reform movement is on a collision course with the tax-spending limitation movement. Daniel Weiler, who heads the Rand study of Alum Rock, expressed much the same view, as quoted by Leary: "There is a great variety inviting choice, but we have come up against the problem of limited resources, the abrupt new desire for economy in government expressed in the California vote. This seems to indicate a conflict brewing."

The Wisdom of Parental Choice

Some seriously question the ability of many parents to choose what is best for their children. Some parents, it is true, just don't care; others may choose the "wrong" program for their child. Voucher proponents argue that counseling could be set up to eliminate most of this problem, so that the choice of program could be a collective decision between professional educator and family. But there is no assurance that parents would seek or heed such counseling.

In a 1974 study of parental decision-making at Alum Rock, Bridge found that "the Alum Rock experience seems to support strongly the voucher model premise that parents want to influence school decisions, and that the introduction of vouchers will increase parental interest in school decision making."

But what of the quality of parental decisions? In this 1974 report, the results were "mixed," says Bridge. A more complete and perhaps more indicative report by Bridge and Blackman will be out later this year *(A Study*

of Alternatives in American Education, Volume 4: Family Choice in Schooling).

Fraud and Hucksterism

The disturbing consideration repeatedly brought up by voucher opponents is that a voucher system would allow unethical business types to enter the education market, leading to fraud and hucksterism. Of all the foreseeable problems that vouchers might produce, however, this seems to be the most manageable.

Early in the history of the G.I. Bill there was some fraud by fly-by-night schools that taught little of value and then left town. But this was controlled when suitable regulations were placed on recipients of the veterans' scholarship money.

If a voucher system for elementary and secondary education were instituted, government regulations could just as easily control fraud there. To further safeguard the system, only nonprofit organizations could be allowed to organize schools.

Additional Problems

There are, in addition to the above, a batch of "nuts-and-bolts" problems. New schools will have to be built, so provisions must be made for capital funds. Teachers must be certified, and a new tenure system must be structured. Consumer information must be collected and distributed. The minimum competencies of students will have to be assured. New roles, new regulations, and new procedures will be everywhere.

In short, the whole structure of public education would be dramatically changed were a voucher system implemented. This is one of the few points on which voucher opponents and proponents agree.

CONCLUSION

From the preceding pages, it can be seen that the voucher debate involves a great number of complex issues, including church-state conflict, desegregation, school finance reform, and the equalization of opportunity. The most fundamental issue, however, is that of choice.

The issue of choice raises deep questions about national concensus and the extent of diversity in American culture. Greeley asks, "Is unity the result of uniformity or the integration of diversity? Is a common culture achieved by eliminating all variety or by treasuring it within a broad context that revels in diversity?" The voucher debate brings us face-to-face with these questions.

The increasing discussion of diversity, choice, and value systems in education may be signaling a fundamental reconceptualization in America of the balance between unity and diversity, and between liberty and equality. As Denis Doyle, the head of The National Institute of Education's school finance division, sees it,

> there is an increasing awareness that no education is "value free." Public secular education inculcates values as does private, sectarian education. In a mass society, maintaining high standards while recognizing significant but legitimate value differences is a difficult if not impossible task. . . . Our cultures must reflect our democratic traditions and strike some balance between the pull of pluralism and the push of a shared culture. For it is the tension expressed in the alternating attractions of maintaining diverse identities within the context of a common national community that makes the question of choice a serious one.

Most probably, the voucher debate will continue for some time, fueled as it is by the promise of choice and the claims that vouchers will alleviate many of society's

ills. As in the days before the Alum Rock experiment, the claims and counterclaims are primarily speculative, with little hard evidence to back them up.

It is clear, though, that the voucher concept will not just fade away. It is an idea that has entered the political arena, and it will probably not leave until it has had a fair hearing, and perhaps another trial.

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